

II. PARK PURPOSES

MISSION STATEMENT FOR THE STATE PARKS SYSTEM

The North Carolina state parks system exists for the enjoyment, education, health, and inspiration of all our citizens and visitors. The mission of the state parks system is to conserve and protect representative examples of the natural beauty, ecological features and recreation resources of statewide significance; to provide outdoor recreation opportunities in a safe and healthy environment; and to provide education opportunities that promote stewardship of the state's natural heritage.

CLIFFS OF THE NEUSE STATE PARK PURPOSE STATEMENT

In the years following the Civil War, local Wayne County residents seeking to capitalize on the resort potential of the nearby natural mineral springs built hotels in the Whitehall/Seven Springs area. These resort hotels also operated excursion boats that carried guests and tourists up the Neuse River to view the tall cliffs that overlooked the river at the site of the current park. In 1944, local resident Lionel Weil contacted the Superintendent of North Carolina State Parks to inquire about establishing a park on this land, locally known as the Cliffs of the Neuse. The following year, Cliffs of the Neuse State Park was established and the Board of Conservation and Development approved an Advisory Committee for the park. By 1957, the park had grown to 365 acres through donations of conservation-minded residents of the area, including Weil and the Wayne Foundation.

Cliffs of the Neuse State Park is located on one of a series of high cliffs that run northwest to southeast along the Neuse River. Geologic studies show that most of the sediment layers visible in the cliffs belong to the Black Creek formation, which was deposited during the late Cretaceous period over 65 million years ago. The cliffs were formed by the Neuse River, which gradually cut into the Black Creek formation by erosion. The cliffs are composed predominantly of layers of multicolored sands, sandy clays, small gravels, shale and seashells. Colors vary widely with white, tan, yellow and brown being the most common.

The scenic resources provided by the park focus on the cliffs along the Neuse River. During the mid-twentieth century, the scenic view of the multi-colored cliff face towering ninety feet over the river below was a major attraction for tourists to the area who ventured up the river. Nowadays, one can also approach the cliffs from above and look out over the river and riparian lands. A trail lined with oaks, dogwoods and other trees follows the cliff's edge and offers views of the river far below, views often cloaked in a veil of Spanish moss. Pine and hardwood forests and bottomlands provide varied scenic views and offer visitors opportunities to enjoy and appreciate natural settings.

The diverse environments of the park support a registered natural heritage area and seven natural communities that contribute to its biological resources, ranging from dry upland pinelands to wet bottomland hardwoods. The most unusual natural community is the Piedmont/Coastal Plain Acidic Cliff, which is perhaps the largest and best-developed example in the Coastal Plain. The dissected terrain found in the park provided protection from the natural fires that once swept the Coastal Plain, therefore allowing hardwood forest communities, more commonly found in the Piedmont, to persist. In addition, plant associations including galax, red oak and Virginia pine, more typical of mountain habitats farther west, are also found here. Animal life in the park includes the significantly rare Eastern Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*) and the rare Red-cockaded Woodpecker (*Pisoides borealis*).

Recreational opportunities include swimming, diving, and beach activities centered on an 11-acre manmade lake nestled in a natural setting within the park. For those preferring to stay on top of the water, non-motorized boats are available at the boathouse. In addition, the banks of the Neuse River offer many opportunities to cast a line for various fish species. Picnicking, hiking and camping in the park all offer an opportunity to learn firsthand about the out-of-doors in general and also the natural treasures unique to this park.

Much of the archaeological history of the area centers on the river. The Tuscarora and Saponi tribes once occupied much of the land between the Neuse and Pamlico rivers. What is now the park was a ceremonial ground and a gathering place for hunting expeditions, so chosen due to its proximity to a permanent watercourse and the existence of high ground which provided protection from floods and a view of potential enemies. Early European settlers set up a trading center at Whitehall (now Seven Springs), the earliest English settlement in the area. After the Revolutionary War, a stagecoach line and river traffic promoted growth of the agricultural town. A gateway to the Pamlico Sound and the Atlantic Ocean, the Neuse River also played a role in Civil War history – the Confederate ironclad, the CSS Neuse, was built at Whitehall.

The Cliffs of the Neuse State Park exists to preserve the beauty of the cliffs along the river and to protect its unique collection of natural communities. The Division of Parks and Recreation is charged with preserving its geological, scenic, biological, recreational, and archaeological resources and providing park experiences that promote pride in and understanding of this natural heritage.

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